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The Postman Always Rings Twice

By
JON JORY

From the novel by
JAMES M. CAIN

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(THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE)

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The Postman Always Rings Twice

CHARACTERS

Actor 1	Actor 5
Truck Driver	Cop #2
Sackett	Kennedy
	Danaway
Actor 2	
Frank	Actor 6
	Nick
Actor 3	Katz
Policeman	Willie
Coroner	
Thug #1	Actress 1
	Cora
Actor 4	
Cop #1	Actress 2
Thug #2	Nurse
Magistrate	Madge

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Car: There are several ways to do the car. It could be a complete abstraction, a bench or chairs. It could be the frame of a car. It could be the front of the car. It could be a car.

The production, as conceived here, is only one way to do the play. The director may find a better way. Roles may be doubled or not as the theatre desires.

The Postman Always Rings Twice

ACT I

(A bare playing area. Around it stand and sit the entire cast in costume. All the furniture to be used in the play provides an odd structure behind the action. The play is set in 1934. FRANK detaches himself from the cast and moves downstage, brushing the detritus from a stowaway ride on a hay truck off himself. The TRUCK DRIVER moves to FRANK.)

TRUCK DRIVER. Hey you!

FRANK. Me?

TRUCK DRIVER. That's right. You bums stay off our trucks.

FRANK. What's the harm?

TRUCK DRIVER. You tossed three hay bales off. That's money out of my pocket.

FRANK. What's that cost me?

TRUCK DRIVER. It costs you this. *(Punches FRANK, who falls.)* And take this with you. *(Kicks him.)* Stay off the trucks.

(TRUCK DRIVER exits. FRANK picks himself up. Speaks to the audience.)

FRANK. I hiked down the road to find something to eat. That was when I hit this Twin Oaks Tavern.

(The tavern sign flies in, and the cast departs.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. A roadside sandwich joint like a million others in California. There was a luncheon part; and over that, a house part; and off to one side, a filling station.

(NICK, the Greek, enters. He's watering with a hose.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. Hey, mister.

NICK. Me?

FRANK. You see a guy come by here in a Cadillac? He was supposed to pick me up here.

NICK. Not today.

(A rolling screen door is placed, as well as a café table and two chairs. All scene changes are done by the cast.)

FRANK *(disgusted)*. That guy.

NICK. Yeah, people.

(A pause. They regard each other.)

NICK *(cont'd)*. You come in. Good fresh coffee.

(They enter through the screen door.)

FRANK. Nice place.

NICK. What you eat?

(NICK points at a chair. FRANK sits gingerly.)

NICK. You hurt?

FRANK. Took a little fall.

NICK *(points to the menu)*. So?

FRANK. Orange juice, corn flakes, fried eggs and bacon, enchilada, flap jacks and the coffee.

(NICK snorts a laugh and starts offstage.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. One thing I got to tell you. If this guy don't show up, you'll have to trust me for it. Lunch was on the Cadillac and I'm kind of short myself.

NICK (*eyes him*). Hokay, fill'm up. (*Exits to the kitchen.*)

FRANK (*loudly*). You doin' a good business? Not much of a breakfast crowd. You got a cook back there?

NICK (*re-enters with orange juice and corn flakes*). What you do, what kind of work, hey?

FRANK. Oh, one thing and another. Why?

NICK. How old you?

FRANK. Twenty-six.

NICK. Young fellow, hey? I could use a young fellow. My business could use.

FRANK. The place is all right.

NICK. Air. Is a nice. No fog like in Los Angeles.

FRANK. Must be swell at night. Cool.

NICK. Sleep fine. You understand automobile? Fix'm up?

FRANK. Sure. I'm a born mechanic.

NICK. Hey, you think you like here? Pay OK. Food free. Good job.

FRANK. I tell you how it is. I got a couple other propositions, that's my trouble. But I'll think about it. Sure will do that.

(CORA enters from the kitchen with eggs, toast and flapjacks. She's beautiful. FRANK looks her over as she puts the food in front of him.)

FRANK (*cont'd*). Looks good.

(She doesn't meet his eyes or speak.)

NICK. That's my wife.

FRANK. Nice to meetcha.

(She nods and goes back to the kitchen.)

FRANK (*cont'd*). Not a talker.

NICK. Sometimes. What's your name, hey?

FRANK. Frank Chambers.

NICK. Nick Papadakis, mine.

(They shake.)

NICK (*cont'd*). You work, Frank. You like.

(NICK exits. FRANK moves down to the audience. Door, table, chairs off. Stove on.)

FRANK. I pumped some gas. Why not? About three o'clock a guy come along, was all burned up, because somebody pasted a sticker on his wind wing; I had to go to the kitchen to steam it off for him.

(FRANK enters to CORA.)

FRANK (*cont'd*). Enchiladas, huh? Well, you people sure know how to make them.

CORA. What do you mean, you people?

FRANK. I mean you and Nick. The one I had for lunch was a peach.

CORA. Oh.

FRANK. I got to steam this off. You got a cloth I can hold it with?

CORA. That's not what you meant.

FRANK. Sure it is.

CORA. "You people." You think I'm a Mex.

FRANK. Nothing like it.

CORA. Yes you do, you're not the first one. Well, get this, I'm just as white as you are. My name was Smith before I was married. That don't sound much like a Mex does it?

FRANK. Not much.

CORA. What's more. I come from Iowa.

FRANK. Smith. What's your first name?

CORA. Cora. You can call me that if you want to.

FRANK. Cora, sure. And how about calling me Frank?

CORA. You sticking around?

FRANK. Maybe.

(FRANK moves down. Stands beside her.)

CORA. Don't crowd me.

FRANK. How come you married this Greek anyway.

CORA. Is that any of your business?

FRANK. Yeah. Plenty.

CORA. Here's your wind wing.

FRANK. Thanks.

CORA. You think you have my number or what?

FRANK *(a smile)*. See you later.

(Lights change. FRANK moves downstage. Stove off. Table and three chairs set. NICK enters and sits. CORA stands by the table.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. I had what I wanted. She knew I knew. From now on it would be business between her and me. She might not say yes, but she knew I had her number.

(FRANK sits at the table. CORA serves potatoes.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. Nice supper.

NICK *(appraising the serving)*. You don't give enough.

FRANK. I'm fine.

NICK. Give a man something to eat.

CORA (*slaps the bowl down on the table*). Let him serve himself.

NICK. I don't like a stingy house.

FRANK. Nick, I had plenty.

NICK. Hokay, but you have if you want.

FRANK. Everything's OK.

NICK (*pulls CORA to him*). This one, she's all right. She is my little white bird. My little white dove. (*Pats her butt. She moves away.*) Everybody fine.

(*CORA exits.*)

FRANK. Big wind last night.

NICK. All night.

FRANK. You saw the sign out there?

NICK. I see.

FRANK. Blew it right down.

NICK. Is busted.

FRANK. Busted is right. I took a look at it. How'd you get that sign anyway?

NICK. Was here when I buy.

FRANK. Lousy sign, Nick.

NICK. What's it matter?

FRANK. Well, it's out of date. Wonder you do any business at all. Nobody has bulb signs anymore. Neon, now. And what does it say? Twin Oaks, that's all. The tavern part, it's not in lights. Twin Oaks don't make me hungry. You need a new one.

NICK. You think?

FRANK. I drew something up. *(Hands folded paper to NICK.)*

See. Twin Oaks Tavern, Best Barbeque. N. Papadakis, Prop.
Red, white and blue letters. Neon.

NICK. Is good, huh?

FRANK. Nick, why do we hang up the old sign at all? Why don't you go to the city and get this made? It'll knock 'em for a loop. Nick Papadakis, proprietor. A place is no better than its sign, right?

NICK. No better. I do it. By golly I go.

(Lights change. Table and chairs off. Stove on. FRANK to audience.)

FRANK. Los Angeles was twenty miles down the road, but he shined himself up like he was going to Paris. Wanted to see his name up in the neon. Got out of here like he was scalded, old Nick.

(FRANK is handed a plate, and he takes it to CORA in the kitchen.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. Here's a plate that was out there.

CORA. Oh, thanks.

FRANK. How come you didn't go about the sign with Nick?

CORA. This and that.

FRANK. This and that, right.

CORA. I was going to go, but I started some things cooking, and I thought I better not.

FRANK. Yeah?

CORA. Things to do.

FRANK. I got plenty to do myself.

CORA. Lost your dinner last night. You feeling better?

FRANK. I'm all right.

CORA. Change in the water, something like that.

(FRANK takes her arm.)

CORA *(cont'd)*. What's that about?

FRANK. What do you think?

(Sound of a door being rattled.)

CORA. What's that?

FRANK. Somebody out front rattling the door.

CORA. Is it locked?

FRANK. Maybe I did, I don't know.

(She exits. He drinks a glass of water. She returns.)

CORA. They went away.

FRANK. I don't know why I locked it.

(They look at each other.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. Let's leave it locked.

CORA. No lunch trade if it's locked.

(He pulls her to him and kisses her. She responds and then pushes him away. She slaps her head hard several times.)

FRANK. Hey.

CORA *(back into his arms)*. Bite me! Bite me hard.

(When she pulls back there is blood on both their faces. He picks her up and carries her off. A momentary black-out. Lights up on FRANK.)

FRANK. For two days after that I was dead, but the Greek was sore at me, so I got by all right.

(During this speech the stage is cleared.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. He was sore because I hadn't fixed the swing door. She told him it swung back and hit her in the mouth. It was all swelled up where I bit it.

(FRANK and CORA sit on the empty stage. They each have a beer.)

CORA. Nice out.

FRANK. What else has California got?

(She laughs.)

FRANK *(cont'd)*. You got little blue creases on your lips. Swollen too.

CORA. I got that past him.

FRANK. He buys anything you say. The only thing he sees is that new sign. *(An imitation.)* By golly! By golly!

(She rumples his hair.)

CORA. Just like him.

FRANK. You want me to be just like him?

(FRANK grabs her.)

CORA. No. Nick will be back. He just went up the road 'cause he heard there's a guy there undercutting him on gas.

FRANK *(pulling her on top of him)*. How "right back"?

CORA *(escaping)*. Stop it, Frank. You like blueberry pie?

FRANK. I don't know. Yeah. I guess so.

CORA. I'll make you some.

(He kisses her.)

CORA *(cont'd)*. You're going to get me dirty.

FRANK *(a crooked smile)*. Yeah?

CORA. Yeah. I don't like crashing around in the woods.

FRANK. You telling me you don't like it?

CORA. We better bring him back those steaks he sent us out for.

(He grabs her. She pushes him off.)

CORA *(cont'd)*. I can't go on like this, Frank.

FRANK. Me neither.

CORA. I can't stand it. And I've got to get drunk with you,
Frank. You know what I mean? Drunk.

FRANK. I know.

CORA. And I hate that Greek.

FRANK. Why did you marry him? You never did tell me that?

CORA. We haven't wasted any time on talk. I was working in
a hash house. You spend two years in a Los Angeles hash
house, and you'll take the first guy that's got a gold watch.

FRANK. When did you leave Iowa?

CORA. Three years ago. I won a beauty contest. I won a high-
school beauty contest, in Des Moines. The prize was a trip
to Hollywood. I got off the chief with fifteen guys taking
my picture and two weeks later I was in the hash house.

FRANK. You get in the movies?

CORA. They gave me a test. It was all right in the face, but
they talk now, the pictures. And when I began to talk up
there on the screen, they knew me for what I was and so did
I. A cheap Des Moines trollop, that had as much chance in
pictures as a monkey has.